elephant reserves, *viz.*, Wayanad, Anamudi, Nilambur and Periyar, have been established in Kerala for focused and systematic management of elephants in the State.

Protection of the interests of Adivasis (Tribals) living in the forests

4701. SHRI P.K. MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) the steps being taken by Government for protecting the interest of Adivasis (Tribals) living in forests;

(b) the complete details thereof; and

(c) the view of Government in respect of introducing Forests Rights Act in the Parliament for tribals?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) and (b) With a view to protecting the rights of forest dwellers including tribals, on forest land, the Ministry of Environment and Forests has issued guidelines in 1990 for regularisation of eligible encroachments, conversion of forest villages into revenue villages and for settlement of disputed claims and disputes regarding pattas/leases/grants involving forest land. Also, general approval has been granted in respect of tribal areas, under Section-2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, for underground laying of electricity cables, drinking water supply/pipelines, telephone lines in 2003. In addition, recently in January 2005, general approval has been granted for diversion of not more than one hectare of forest land for executing public utility works like schools, dispensary/hospital, electric and telecommunication lines, drinking water, rainwater harvesting structure, minor irrigation canal, non-conventional sources of energy, skill upgradation/vocational raining centre, power sub-stations, communication posts and police establishments like police stations/outposts/watch towers by Government. The State Governments have also been requested *vide* letter dated 21.12.2004 not to resort to eviction of tribals and forest dwellers other than ineligible encroachers, till the complete survey is done for verification of rights of such people. So far, encroachments over 3.66 lakh hectare of forest land in eight State, have been regularised and 384 forest villages in two States have been converted into revenue villages. The people living in and around forests are already enjoying usufructory rights in respect of collection of minor forest produce, for their *bonafide* use. Also, the State Governments have been advised to bring about a legislation conferring ownership rights in respect of minor

forest product on forest dwelling communities including tribals.

(c) The Central Government intends to introduce a legislation in Parliament to this effect and necessary consultation is underway.

Number of elephants in the country

†4702. SHRI P.K. MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the number of elephants is declining rapidly in the country;

(b) if so, the figures of number of elephants during the last five years;

(c) the major steps taken by Government in this regard keeping in view the decreasing number of elephants; and

(d) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) and (b) No, Sir. The estimated population of elephants in the country has shown an increase from 25,877 in 1997 to 26,413 in 2002 when the last census was carried out.

(c) and (d) Elephants have been included in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 which prohibits their hunting and also trade in ivory. Export of ivory from the country is also banned. India is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna & Flora (CITES) which prohibits international trade in ivory and other elephant products. Government of India provides financial assistance under Project Elephant to major elephant-bearing states in the country for protection of elephants and their habitats and also for mitigating human-elephant conflict. An amount of Rs. 13.34 Cr. was released under the Project during 2004-05. 25 Elephant Reserves have been notified in the country for the systematic and focused management of elephants. Government of India has also empowered the C.B.I. under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to apprehend and prosecute the wildlife offenders.

Factories Polluting the Rivers in Kerala

4703. SHRI N.K. PREMACHANDRAN: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have identified any public or private sector factories which pollute the rivers in Kerala and if so, the details thereof;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.